

**IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION TO  
IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL DESCRIPTIVE TEXT****Ribka Novana Sirait<sup>1</sup>, Lis Supiatman<sup>2</sup>**

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e-mail: [Ribkavna@gmail.com](mailto:Ribkavna@gmail.com)**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to implement differentiated learning from Grade 8 to improve students' competencies and identify and identify teachers' tasks. Background This study is based on the needs of students with personal differences in learning skills and styles, especially at the junior level of education. Differentiated learning is widespread in educational literature, but the application of English lessons in Indonesia to specific contexts remains limited. In this study, a classroom campaign survey will examine whether classroom observations include classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student task analyses. The topic of this study is for eighth-grade students. The results showed that the application of differentiated lessons improved their understanding. The phases to be applied by teachers include identifying learning skills through initial tests, adapting learning content and processes, grouping students based on learning skills and preferences, and providing feedback. Challenges include the difficulty of adapting materials to different classes and the lack of time to determine the differentiation process. Overall, this study provides insights into teachers' practices and tasks for conducting learning in the English language classroom.

**Key words:** *differentiated instruction, English language teaching, Classroom Action Research, writing skills.*

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the key components in creating a nation is education. The government and society in Indonesia are very concerned about the quality of education. English plays an important role in our national life and education system. It teaches not only subject matter, but also a medium that conveys global knowledge, ideas, and values. As a literary and culturally rich language, English opens access to a wide range of literary works, scientific knowledge, and global perspectives, enriching students' intellectual and cultural understanding. Historically, English played an important role as a uniform force in India's freedom struggle and served as a medium of communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds.

Today's world, English continues to serve as a language for the Left. In particular, multilingual countries bridge the communication gap between speakers of different native languages. In addition, English has contributed significantly to

the further development of learning by acting as the primary language of academic texts, research publications, and technological innovation. In the context of globalization, English has become the language of the village around the world, allowing people from different regions of the world to connect, cooperate, and exchange knowledge. Given its global importance, English language acquisition has become essential, especially in educational settings, to actively compete and participate in international discourse.

To fully utilize the benefits of English, students must acquire all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of these, writing is often considered the most difficult ability for second language learners to master due to the complex requirements regarding grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization. Therefore, educators need to implement effective and integrated educational strategies that cater to the different needs of learners and support the development of their writing knowledge. (Wilson, 1968)

Based on the initial observation at SMP Negeri 5 Tanjungbalai, it was found that many students have difficulties in writing English texts especially in descriptive texts. Most students have limited vocabulary and often make grammatical mistakes, which impact the quality of their writing, and some students also have difficulty understanding the lesson due to the different abilities of each student. therefore, it is necessary to apply effective teaching strategies to overcome these problems. One of the appropriate teaching strategies is Differentiated Instruction, which can help accommodate the needs and abilities of diverse students in the classroom.

Differentiated instruction is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. (Hall, 2005)

This research aims to implement Differentiated Instruction (DI) to see if the implementation of the strategy can effectively improve students' writing ability, especially in writing descriptive texts, in class VIII students of SMP Negeri 5 Tanjung Balai. Brown (2004: 255), as cited in (Yulianti et al., 2019) state that writing is 'a process of creating ideas from students' knowledge into written form.'

According to Gerot and Wignell (1994: 208), as cited in (Curup, n.d.) "descriptive text is a text type we use when we want to tell how something looks, smells, feels, acts, tastes, sounds, etc". Descriptive text is a type of text that is used to describe an object in detail based on physical characteristics and other characteristics that can be observed or felt. Mastery of descriptive text is very important for junior high school students because this text is not only part of the compulsory material in the English learning curriculum, but also trains students' ability to develop ideas, enrich vocabulary, improve observation skills, and express information systematically in writing. Therefore, descriptive text learning needs to be designed with the right strategy so that students are able to understand and produce the text well.

## METHOD

This study is class room action research that aims to determine whether the application of Differentiated Instruction can improve the descriptive text writing ability of class VIII students at SMP Negeri 5 Tanjungbalai. Classroom Action Research is a method of finding out what works best in your own classroom so that you can improve student learning. (*No Title*, 1999) The research was conducted on one class consisting of 18 students. This research took place in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of two meetings.

Before the implementation of the action, students were divided into two groups based on the initial test results, namely group A and group B. Group A consisted of students with low ability. They received more detailed guidance and explanations, as well as customized materials to make them easier to understand. This group needed intensive assistance to understand the structure and content of descriptive text. Meanwhile, group B consisted of students with high ability. Students in this group were given more complicated and complex material. The teacher does not give too much explanation, but still accompanies and answers questions if needed. This division is done to adjust the needs and potential of each student, so that learning becomes more effective and touches all levels of ability.

Differentiated Instruction is implemented through several steps. Firstly, flexible grouping groups students based on their learning abilities. Secondly, modified assignments are tasks that are adjusted in difficulty for each group. Third, tiered assignments are tasks that are designed at different levels of difficulty but still focus on the same topics and objectives. Fourth, a progressing evaluation or continuous assessment is used to evaluate students' progress and becomes the basis for teaching improvement. Differentiated Instruction focuses on whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach. (Mctighe, n.d.)

This study consists of two cycles and four meetings, The activities include planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. In the first cycle, in the first meeting, the teacher delivered the initial material and gave a test to see the students' ability. The second meeting began to apply grouping and different tasks. After that, the teacher made observations and recorded student responses. Reflection was conducted to improve the shortcomings in the first cycle. In the second cycle, the material was strengthened, and strategies were improved based on the results of the reflection. Each meeting ended with the collection of assignments.

The assessment in this study used portfolio assessment techniques. Portfolio assessment is carried out by collecting student work during the learning process to analyse their development. Each student worked on descriptive text writing assignments at each meeting, and all the assignments were collected. The assessment was carried out based on several criteria, namely text structure (orientation, description, closing), vocabulary, grammar, and creativity. Students' final scores were obtained from the average of all tasks collected and assessed during the two learning cycles.

Differentiated instructions can be applied to enhance the learning experience with the following steps, they are:

1. Flexible Grouping: In this study, students will be grouped based on their abilities. Providing students with options in how they demonstrate their understanding can increase motivation and engagement.
2. Modified Assignments: Tasks can be adjusted in complexity or format to suit varying skill levels.
3. Tiered Assignments: Assignments are designed with different levels of difficulty, allowing all students to work on the same content while being appropriately challenged.
4. Ongoing Assessment: Continuous assessment helps educators understand student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.
5. Learning Stations: Setting up different themes with various activities can cater to diverse learning preferences within the same classroom session.

**Table 2. Implementation of cycles one and two**

	Meetings	Thene
Cycle 1	1 & 2	Describing a person (Friends, Animal, School)
Cycle 2	3 & 4	Describing a person (friends, actors, singers, athletes, famous people)

Observation data was conducted to determine the difference in students' activities and responses between the implementation of cycle I and cycle II. Observations were made to assess students' involvement in the learning process, such as activity in discussions, participation in writing tasks, and attention to teacher instructions. Observation assessment was conducted on the second day of each cycle, during learning activities that focused on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction.

**Table 3. Observation**

	Aspect Assessment
1	Students' concentration and engagement during the teaching and learning activities.
2	The frequency with which students asked questions to the teacher for clarification of materials or instructions
3	Student-to-student interaction, such as discussions, inquiries, or offering assistance in understanding the writing tasks.
4	Student activity in responding to teacher questions, both orally and in written form.
5	Students' ability to complete writing tasks based on their individual proficiency levels, in alignment with the Differentiated Instruction strate

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the students' test can be seen in the following table of scores.

No	Students' Name	Rubric Components						
		Vocabu lary Identifi cation	Use of Adjec tives	Text Struct ure	Creati vity	Gram mar Accur acy		
1	S1	MA	HA	MA	LA	MA	50	
2	S2	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
3	S3	HA	HA	HA	MA	HA	70	
4	S4	MA	MA	MA	LA	LA	40	
5	S5	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
6	S6	HA	MA	MA	LA	LA	45	
7	S7	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
8	S8	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
9	S9	HA	HA	HA	MA	HA	70	
10	S10	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
11	S11	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
12	S12	MA	HA	MA	LA	MA	50	
13	S13	MA	HA	MA	LA	MA	50	
14	S14	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
15	S15	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
16	S16	HA	MA	MA	MA	MA	55	
17	S17	HA	MA	MA	LA	LA	45	
18	S18	MA	MA	LA	LA	LA	35	
<b>MEAN = 43,89</b>								

**Table 4. The Score of Pre-test Students' initial ability**

Information on the results of the pretest of descriptive text writing ability is used to determine the level of students' initial abilities before the application of differentiated Instruction. This pretest score became a reference in grouping students into several ability categories, namely high, medium and low. This group formation aims to make differentiated learning can be applied effectively according to the needs of each student.

### 1. Students' ability to identify vocabulary:

The results showed that 27.78% of students had high ability in identifying vocabulary in writing descriptive text, while 72.22% of students were still in the medium to low category in determining and identifying vocabulary in writing descriptive text.

It can be concluded that most students in Grade 8-1 still have difficulties in identifying and using vocabulary in descriptive text writing. This shows that in cycle 1, students' vocabulary skills still need to be improved through more focused learning and the use of learning strategies that encourage active and contextualised vocabulary acquisition. It can be concluded that most students in grade 8-1 still have difficulties in identifying and using vocabulary in descriptive text writing.

## **2. Students' ability to use adjectives:**

The results showed that 27.78% of students had high ability in using adjectives, 61.11% of students had medium ability, and 11.11% of students had low ability in using adjectives in descriptive text.

This shows that most students in grades 8-1 are still in the medium category in terms of the use of adjectives. Therefore, more varied and directed learning is needed to improve students' ability to use adjectives appropriately in descriptive text writing.

## **3. Students' ability in text structure:**

The results showed that 27.78% of students had high ability in understanding and using descriptive text structure, 27.78% of students had medium ability, and 44.44% of students had low ability in composing text structure correctly.

This shows that most students in grade 8-1 still have difficulties in understanding text structure, especially in distinguishing the identification and description parts in descriptive text.

## **4. Students' skills in writing descriptive text:**

The results showed that 33.33% of students had moderate ability in writing descriptive text. They were able to compose the text with a fairly clear structure and used some varied vocabulary. Meanwhile, 66.67% of students still have low ability. Most of them were only able to write very simple texts, lacked creativity, and tended not to follow the descriptive text structure well.

## **5. Grammar and Accuracy:**

The results showed that as many as 3 students (14.81%) were in the high ability category in the use of grammar and accuracy in writing descriptive text. Furthermore, there were 5 students (18.52%) who were in the medium ability category, where students in this category still made some mistakes, but generally understood the basic sentence structure. Meanwhile, 11 students (66.67%) fell into the low ability category.

In the planning stage, the researcher identified the problems faced by students in writing descriptive texts, especially in vocabulary mastery, grammar accuracy, and text structure. Based on these results, the researcher developed a lesson plan using the Differentiated Learning approach.

In this planning, students were grouped based on their writing ability level, namely high, medium, and low categories. This is so that the implementation of learning can be adjusted to the abilities of each group so that the learning process is more effective.

During the learning process, observations were conducted to monitor students' engagement, participation, and responses to the learning activities. Most students appeared enthusiastic and actively involved. In this assessment, five specific aspects were observed and evaluated.

1. Students' concentration and engagement during the teaching and learning activities.
2. The frequency with which students asked questions to the teacher for clarification of materials or instructions.
3. Student-to-student interaction, such as discussions, inquiries, or offering assistance in understanding the writing tasks.
4. Student activity in responding to teacher questions, both orally and in written form.
5. Students' ability to complete writing tasks based on their individual proficiency levels, in alignment with the Differentiated Instruction strate

**Table 6. Students' Scores in Pre-Test and Post-Test 1 (Cycle I)**

No	Students' Name	Pre-Test	Post-Test 1
1	S1	50	50
2	S2	35	45
3	S3	70	85
4	S4	40	35
5	S5	35	40
6	S6	45	55
7	S7	35	50
8	S8	35	60
9	S9	70	85
10	S10	35	50
11	S11	35	65
12	S12	50	55
13	S13	50	60
14	S14	35	55
15	S15	35	55
16	S16	55	45
17	S17	45	45
18	S18	35	45

Based on the results of Cycle I, it can be concluded that the implementation of Differentiated Instruction began to show positive effects, particularly in increasing student engagement and vocabulary usage. However, there are still areas that require improvement, especially in grammar and writing creativity. Therefore, in the next cycle, the learning activities are planned to place a stronger emphasis on grammar practice and to incorporate more varied media to support the development of students' ideas and text structure.

The planning for Cycle II was focused on refining the writing instruction strategy through a more targeted approach using Differentiated Instruction. Several actions were planned to address the challenges identified in Cycle I. These actions included: (1) assigning writing tasks tailored to the varying proficiency levels of the students, and (2) preparing additional learning resources such as sample texts, thematic vocabulary lists, and simple grammar guides for students who needed further reinforcement.

For students with lower proficiency, specific support was provided, including vocabulary reinforcement, understanding the basic structure of descriptive texts, and exposure to simple text examples. These measures were intended to make it easier for students to comprehend and produce writing that adhered to the correct structure. Both groups, regardless of their proficiency levels, were also instructed in grammar accuracy, particularly focusing on the use of the simple present tense in descriptive texts to enhance the grammatical precision of their writing.

In Cycle II, further observations were made to assess students' progress and improvements following the implementation of differentiated instruction. The aspects evaluated in this study are as follows:

1. Students' concentration and engagement during the teaching and learning activities.
2. The frequency with which students asked questions to the teacher for clarification of materials or instructions.
3. Student-to-student interaction, such as discussions, inquiries, or offering assistance in understanding the writing tasks.
4. Student activity in responding to teacher questions, both orally and in written form.
5. Students' ability to complete writing tasks based on their individual proficiency levels, in alignment with the Differentiated Instruction strategy.

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Aspects Assessed								
No	Students' Name	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Remarks
1	S1	3	3	3	3	3	15	Good
2	S2	4	3	3	3	4	17	Excellent
3	S3	4	3	4	4	4	19	Excellent
4	S4	3	3	3	2	3	14	Good
5	S5	3	3	3	3	3	15	Good
6	S6	3	3	3	3	4	16	Good
7	S7	3	3	3	3	3	15	Good
8	S8	3	3	3	2	3	14	Good
9	S9	4	3	4	4	4	19	Excellent
10	S10	4	3	3	3	4	17	Excellent
11	S11	3	3	3	3	4	16	Good
12	S12	4	3	4	4	4	19	Excellent
13	S13	3	3	3	3	4	16	Good

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**Table**

14	S14	4	3	4	4	4	19	Excellent
15	S15	4	3	4	3	4	18	Excellent
16	S16	4	3	4	3	4	18	Excellent
17	S17	3	3	3	2	2	13	Good
18	S18	3	3	3	2	2	13	Good

7.

**Observation Assessment Sheet in Cycle I**

The writing results of students in Class 8-1 increased after the implementation of the actions in Cycle II.

**Table 8. Students' Scores in Pre-Test, Post-Test I, Post-Test II (Cycle II)**

	Students' Name	Pre-Test	Post-Test	
			1	2
1	S1	50	50	53,57
2	S2	35	45	77,08
3	S3	70	85	88,89
4	S4	40	35	43,75
5	S5	35	40	62,5
6	S6	45	55	70,83
7	S7	35	50	52,8
8	S8	35	60	62,5
9	S9	70	85	92,86
10	S10	35	50	75
11	S11	35	65	70,83
12	S12	50	55	60,71
13	S13	50	60	60,71
14	S14	35	55	60,67
15	S15	35	55	70,83
16	S16	55	45	77,08
17	S17	45	45	35,71
18	S18	35	45	37,5

The 'Post-Test 2' score is calculated by combining the scores from multiple-choice questions and essay questions. Since there were 8 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, we used approximate weights for these questions. The calculation used a weight of 70% for multiple-choice and 30% for essay, as essay questions are considered to measure deeper understanding.

For each student in the simulation, the researcher estimated how many multiple-choice questions they answered correctly (as a percentage) and how well their essay answers did (also as a percentage of the maximum score). Then, researchers multiplied these percentages by the weight of each section and totalled them to get the total 'Post-Test 2' score.

The 'Post-Test 2' score is a combined multiple-choice and essay score that has been given an approximate weighting, taking into account the students' possible level of understanding of the question.

**Table 9. The Average Scores and Percentage Increase from Cycle I to Cycle II**

Aspects Observed	Average Scores of Cycles		Increased	Percentage Increase
	1	2		
1	2.11	3.44	1.33	62.09%
2	2.44	3	0.56	22.95%
3	2.83	3.28	0.45	15.90%
4	2.17	2.88	0.71	32.72%
5	1,72	3.47	1.75	101.74%

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{\text{Total Score of All Students}}{\text{Number of Students}}$$

Based on the table above, the post-test scores in cycle II showed an increase compared to cycle I. Although the average student score was still relatively low, the increase showed a positive development in the ability to write descriptive text. This indicates that the application of Differentiated Instruction in the learning process began to show its effectiveness. If this strategy continues to be developed and adjusted to the needs of students, then the improvement in students' writing ability is expected to continue gradually. Thus, differentiated Instruction can be an appropriate approach to improve students' learning outcomes, especially in writing skills.

**Table 10. The Improvement of Students' Scores in the Pre-Test, Post-Test I, and Post-Test II**

	Score
Pre-Test	43,89
Post-test 1	54,4
Post-test 2	64,06

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of class action research conducted in two cycles regarding the application of Differentiated Instruction to improve students 'descriptive text writing ability in class VIII at SMP Negeri 5 Tanjungbalai, it can be concluded that this strategy proved effective in improving students' writing ability.

This can be seen from the increase in students' average scores in each cycle. The average score in the pre-test of 44.16 increased to 54.44 in the post-test of cycle I, and continued to increase to 64.06 in the post-test of cycle II. Although the average score in cycle II has not yet fully reached the Minimum Completion Criteria

set at 70, the increasing trend shows a positive and significant development in students' writing ability if it continues to be developed.

From the 18 students who became research subjects, as many as 16 students showed an increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test of cycle II. Meanwhile, 2 students experienced a decrease in score in the post-test of cycle II. This decrease was thought to be caused by external factors, such as lack of concentration during the learning process and low attendance-where both students were recorded several times not attending the lesson, so they did not get the full learning.

Thus, the application of Differentiated Instruction can be considered as one of the effective alternative strategies to improve students' descriptive text writing ability. The application of Differentiated instruction provides space for students to learn according to their individual abilities, learning styles, and needs, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful, adaptive, and responsive to the diversity of students in the classroom.

Considering that this study was conducted over only two cycles with a sample size of 18 students in a single class, it is suggested that future research on similar topics extend the duration and increase the number of cycles. This will allow for more comprehensive and reliable results. Additionally, future researchers should take into account external factors that may influence students' learning outcomes, such as motivation, the learning environment, and students' readiness to learn.

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